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BY

WORTHINGTON CHAUNCEY FORD

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THE CAMPAIGN OF 1844.

In describing a political campaign three factors demand attention: policies, candidates and actual results. The noisy and irresponsible claims of party, the rosy and deceptively favorable atmosphere which surrounds the candidates, constitute the apparent and picturesque aspects of the contest, and are sometimes so far removed from actualities as to involve a tragedy of hope. The cold grey light of the day after election is the true medium for measuring the expectations, the claims and the character of the struggle. No appeal, calm or frenzied, lies from that judgment. The successful candidate begins to feel the responsibilities of his position when his followers, the unselfish as well as the party "bummers," press for reward, or with advice. When that stage is reached the campaign has become ancient history. The defeated are forgotten, the platform put away, and a popular mandate claimed for all acts of the new administration. The campaign of 1844 was peculiar in this: it marked the end of a quite remarkable political career—that of Van Buren; it also unmistakably marked a division between North and South which could only be healed in blood. It brought into strong relief a character of Massachusetts origin, but of truly national proportion.

In 1843, the principles of the two contending parties (for no one believed the weight of the Liberty Party could affect the result) were centred upon questions that played little part in the campaign. Banking, currency, distribution, and tariff, had been discussed for years, and the division in opinion upon them was as wide as ever, and unfortunately though necessarily, rested upon party lines. The attitude of the leading candidates throughout the Union upon these

questions was known, and the debates in Congress showed little energy or originality. They were questions which, like the poor, were and are always with us; and like the poor, required a modification in treatment as the old measures became inadequate, and new evils or conditions arose. Over none of them could the country lash itself into a fury, and no one of them seemed to offer a single feature that could sweep through the States and on its merit carry the party to victory. Tyler was playing with Texas much as his predecessors had done, and in so playing invited war to the country and impeachment to himself. In the first weeks of 1844 no one could have said with confidence that the tariff would have been settled to general satisfaction, or Texas brought nearer assured independence or even annexation to the Union. The calm of political affairs was broken only by the Whig dislike of Tyler, and by the violence of discussion in Congress. A saying of the time well expressed the situation. Seven principles governed the parties, the five loaves and two fishes.

Under this apparently calm exterior forces were at work at once permanent in their direction and increasing in strength, but these forces were tending to rend the country into sections at war with one another. For an expression of these forces we look in vain to the men who were then contending for the Presidency. The campaign of 1840 had brought a train of bitter disappointment to both parties. The candidate of the Democracy had for years been designated and with only sporadic opposition in harmless force and position. Van Buren had been the political heir of Jackson, and custom prescribed a second term as his due. The question of Vice-President was as usual of little importance, something to be thrown to the South or West with a reckless disregard of possibilities that in the actual event of the other party amounted to a tragedy. For Harrison was the chosen leader of the Whigs; and his running mate was Tyler, a Virginian, who inherited every quality calculated to antagonize the party from which he received his nomination. The Virginian dynasty ended in 1824, with the election of John Quincy Adams, and had in subsequent

time exhausted its capacity for well-doing, while retaining, even in accentuated form, its capacity for political and administrative mischief. The election of 1840 long remained in memory as a most remarkable exhibition of popular feeling. It was the campaign of log cabins, rolling balls, coon skins and hard cider. It was vociferous, quite meaningless and inconclusive, save in ending in the defeating of the Jackson Democrats.[1] That the noise, the drunkenness and the hurrahs overthrew the Jacksonians, as was claimed, is not for one moment to be admitted. The financial conditions following the panic of 1837 were sufficient to account for the result. A brief exhibition of Harrison was followed by the first experience of a Vice-President's succession to office. The experience was not altogether satisfying. A man who leaves his own to join the opposing party is an object of suspicion to both. He loses the confidence of the one, without gaining that of the other. At heart a strict constructionist, Tyler could never wear the Whig uniform gracefully or willingly. He acted according to his conscience, and it was a conscience that could not entirely act with either Whigs or Republican-Democrats. Three years of opposition brought round another presidential contest, and under new conditions. Such a stampede as had occurred in 1840 could not again occur. On this point Van Buren was confident. "Can we expect the people of this country to maintain the elevated standing in the eyes of the world, which they have hitherto enjoyed, if, after the lapse of years, and the fullest opportunity for reflection, they suffer themselves to be a second time operated upon by appliances, from the use of which every friend to free government must turn with mortification and disgust."[2]

The country had slowly recovered from the effects of its speculative intoxication, and Tyler had solved none of the problems handed on by Van Buren in 1841. Before 1843 the Whigs were hopelessly divided, with Webster

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[1] "We go for Tippecanoe and Tyler too,
Without a why or wherefore." —*Campaign Song.*

[2] *Van Buren to Snowden and others*, January 29, 1844, MS.

and Tyler on one side and Clay on the other. Before 1844 Tyler was dreaming of a renomination, counting upon the support of a part of the Whigs and some of his former associates among the Democrats, and a brilliant political manœuvre. Ambition is ever brightly coloured, but the ambitions of a man in Tyler's situation were veritable will-o'-the-wisps. No act could give him the confidence of the Democrats; every act tended to deprive him of any confidence of the Whigs. Named in derision "Captain" Tyler he exerted little influence upon party movements though willing to bargain with every faction.[3]

Nor was the position of the Democracy as good as surface signs would indicate. Apparently the party acquiesced in the claims of Van Buren to another nomination, and on the policies of his first term, policies directly inherited from Jackson. But indications were not wanting of restiveness under his leadership, and under the dictation of a policy which no longer represented a quality of fight in it, something ringing in tone to arouse the full energies of the patriots who did the voting, or saw to it that others voted to enable them to reap the rewards. Van Buren had rivals in 1844 as he had in 1840, but the interval of four years had greatly fed their hopes, and opened a vista of political accidents by which they could profit. Even Jackson's influence had declined, and his command was humored rather than obeyed. A letter from him served to bolster up a cause or an individual, but could not point out a cause or a success. To remove Van Buren from the path of these ambitious ones many schemes were started. It was proposed to place him on the Supreme Bench and then take up Silas Wright as a candidate. If this idea originated with Tyler, as was believed at the time, it may be taken as a measure of his statesmanship and political management. When Wright was consulted he answered: "Tell Mr. Tyler from me, that if he desires to give to this whole country a broader, deeper, heartier laugh than it ever had,

[3] "The Elections of yesterday and the day before sufficiently prove that there is no schism in the Democratic party, and not the shadow of a party for the election of John Tyler as President of the United States." Adams, *Memoirs*, XI, 446.

and at his own expense, he can effect it by making that nomination."[4]

In North and South this tendency to question the availability of Van Buren made itself felt, but not to such an extent as to awaken in him any suspicion of his success in winning the nomination. The Southerners muttered something about the "hypocrisy" of the New York politicians, and attributed their conduct and sentiments to Van Buren. In the Northwest, Lewis Cass was coming forward as a candidate of some pretentions. In Pennsylvania, which had declared for Buchanan in 1842, his adherents were feeling the pulse of the State in his favor. The result was not promising. One of the delegates to the Pittsburg Convention expressing a preference for Van Buren was called a "sap-headed fool"; another used the epithet "a d—d liar" several times, and it was finally decided to refer the matter to the people.[5] It was too early to push Buchanan for such a place.

The leading figure from the South was Calhoun, no longer of presidential size, but possessing a following sufficient to awaken apprehension in the minds of his competitors. He himself was so completely absorbed by his views on slavery, and his efforts to ward off any attack, foreign or domestic upon it, that he had ceased to be looked upon in any sense as a practical leader. With the concentrated intensity of a fanatic he possessed some of the qualities of a prophet; but the cause he represented required other methods and other weapons that he could bring. South Carolina in 1832 had received a set-back that had relegated her leaders into that rather suspected and certainly uninfluential class of violent agitators without enough force even to effect a part of their purpose. In heart they were still nullifiers, but the increasing weight of opposition to slavery drove them to a defence of that institution and to the neglect of all other problems of state. So Calhoun found his place in Tyler's cabinet, whence he could conduct a keenly logical but entirely futile contest in words with Great Britain—

[4] *Silas Wright to Van Buren*, January 2, 1844. MS.
[5] *O. H. Browne to Van Buren*, January 1, 1844. MS.

supposed to be plotting the downfall of slavery in the United States. He was in his element, and even to this day the reader of his despatches is struck by their power of refined argument, and by their entire want of any quality which could make them acceptable. A monk of the Middle Ages would show just those powers and just those defects. As a political factor he had ceased to exist. Tyler admitted that he did not so much as consult Calhoun upon his own convention at Baltimore.[6] In South Carolina the Calhoun men were refractory and quite disposed to have nothing to do with the Baltimore Convention, on the ground that it was a "packed jury."[7] The friends of Polk in the South reasoned thus: that Van Buren would be first on the ticket, but as he would not be entirely acceptable to West and South, those sections must be reconciled by naming to the second place a man like Polk, who would be assured of the entire southern vote. Such an argument received support by the Mississippi Democratic Convention, held January 6, 1844, which nominated Van Buren for the Presidency, endorsed Polk for the second place, after rejecting the names of Calhoun, R. M. Johnson and W. R. King.

Henry Clay was the sole candidate of the Whigs, and the confidence of victory which now surrounded him made him the shining mark of hostile criticism as well as friendly adoration. Of the man nothing need be said beyond the tribute paid to him by Webster in this very campaign: "He is a man of frankness and honor, of unquestioned talent and ability, and of a noble and generous bearing."[8] To his enemies he was a demagogue. His career had not been limited by consistency, some of his acts, both private and public, were picturesquely in violation of recognized conventions; but the personality of the man carried him through situations wherein even stronger men would be wrecked. And now the idol of his party, in the face of a divided opposition, he counted upon gaining his wish, and

[6] "As to my convention at Baltimore, Mr. Calhoun had no more to do with it than a man in Nova Zembla. I never troubled myself even to enquire his opinion about it." *John Tyler to John S. Cunningham*, May 3, 1856.

[7] *Garland to Van Buren*, January 12, 1844. MS.

[8] Speech at Valley Forge, October 3, 1844. *Works*, II, 280.

overreached himself in grasping at it. Before two months had passed his position on Texas was more than dubious, and the more he explained, the greater was the doubt of his conviction.[9]

If a new candidate was to be, new issues must be raised. The national bank question could not receive attention because of Tyler's attitude. The leading discussions in the last session had been upon the tariff, which was not a strong point in Van Buren's past career, and Rule 21 of the House of Representatives, involving the right of petition. Some complained that Congress had apparently "settled down to an exclusive consideration of the 21st rule, and of such other abstract propositions as the few friends of Mr. Calhoun and old Mr. Adams choose to entertain it with."[10] Tracy of New York explained the divisions among the Democrats on those questions as due to the fact that "our party is broader than our principles," an explanation at once euphemistic and on the whole uncomplimentary to the party. Inasmuch as the agitation on these two questions was seen to come from Van Buren's friends, the South warned him that a continuance in that course would arouse deep distrust and dissatisfaction, which would extend to the presidential question and to him as the northern candidate. Had tariff and abolition petitions alone been the issues, Calhoun would have thriven on the declamatory agitation.

It would be interesting to compile the various criticisms passed upon Van Buren, for his friends and enemies had thus gauged the man not without accuracy. Rives, of Virginia, who had been read out of the Jackson party for alleged "apostasy,"—a favorite word with the old Tennessean,—announced that he was opposed to the "fatal and demoralizing tendencies of Mr. Van Buren's whole system of political action, and denounced his support as an unscrupulous and sordid party oligarchy, working by the "secret and invisible agency of self constituted *conclaves*

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[9] "The object of Clay's highest ambition escaped him because, at the decisive moment he was untrue to himself." Schurz. *Henry Clay*, II, 265.

[10] *Silas Wright to Polk*, February 27, 1844, MS.

and *caucuses,* controlled with absolute sway by a few bold and adroit political managers."[11] The criticisms of friends went deeper. Buchanan spoke of Van Buren's want of popularity in 1840, as one of the causes of the disaster of that year. The men who were Van Buren men acted more because of their hope of being carried by him into office and power than because of real affection or confidence in the man himself. The very fact of his being the inevitable candidate increased the irritation due to his having suffered a severe defeat in 1840, and his past record was being overhauled in a spirit that boded much explanation on his part. His vote on the tariff of 1828, "the tariff of abominations," proved an annoying subject.

Unexpectedly rumors spread of negotiations begun by Tyler for the annexation of Texas, and the possibility of a treaty became the engrossing topic.[12] The question was not a new one, but one phase of it now became dominant—the influence such a measure would have on political supremacy. The contest between Whig and Democrat, could be set aside as immaterial; the question of slave and free States assumed a vast importance. But again, it was not existing conditions which constituted the real problem, but future possibilities. Dissolution of the Union was the talk almost of the street. Did not this in itself mark the extraordinary change which had taken place in policy since 1832, the height of the nullification contest? It was not necessary to go back so far.

In December, 1843, Clay declined to reply to a question on the annexation of Texas to the United States, addressed to him by Mr. Child, Editor of an abolition paper, on the ground that he did not think it right, *unnecessarily,* to present new questions to the public. It would be wicked in Tyler, he said, to introduce an exciting topic, for his own

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[11] *Rives to Edmond Fontaine,* January 1, 1844.

[12] Clay, in July, 1844, thought the Texas question "was a bubble blown up by Mr. Tyler in the most exceptionable manner, for sinister purposes, and its bursting has injured nobody but Mr. Van Buren." *To Stephen H. Müller,* July 1, 1844. One of his correspondents, J. C. Wright, believed the question of annexation would be no more than a nine days' topic of vituperation, and added "with the old issues we are safe, depend upon it."

selfish purposes and to produce discord and distraction in the nation.[13] Later in March, after the rumor of negotiations with Texas had become pronounced, and while he was making a progress of the Southern States, he could write that there was "no such anxiety for the annexation here at the South as you might have imagined."[14] This would argue that Clay's political foresight was not good, or that there is danger in such progresses of defeating their very object—that of getting in touch with public opinion, a danger that attends the journeyings of a President as well as a would-be President.

It would have puzzled the most astute politician to give a reasonable forecast of the political situation in the first days of the last week of April, 1844. But in five days of that week a series of pronouncements came that did not clarify the standing of the two parties at once, but gave occasion for a movement that ended in overthrowing the carefully laid plans of Van Buren, in defeating Clay, and in irrevocably turning the public policy to the slave-holders at the cost of disrupting the Democracy and almost of disrupting the Union. On the morning of April 27 the *National Intelligencer* printed a letter from Clay against the immediate annexation of Texas. On the evening of the same day the *Globe* published a letter of Van Buren taking much the same position,[15] a remarkable coincidence which gave rise to a belief that the two opponents had consulted one another on the matter. Four days later the secrecy of the Senate was violated by the publication in the *New*

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[13] *Clay to Crittenden*, December 5, 1843.

[14] *Clay to Crittenden*, March 24, 1844. Seven days later W. S. Fulton wrote to Van Buren: "The Texas treaty is now the engrossing topic here. Mr. Calhoun's arrival induces the belief that a treaty will be immediately signed and sent to the Senate. The Whigs are in great confusion. They do not know what to do. If it is made manifest that Texas will fall into the hands of England, if the Treaty is rejected, they will be compelled to go for the treaty. It will be death to any southern man to vote against the Treaty." *W. S. Fulton to Van Buren*, 31 March, 1844. MS.

[15] Van Buren wrote his letter to W. H. Hammet, a member of Congress from Mississippi, who had asked him to define his position on the question of annexation. Hammet had been a Methodist preacher, but turned politician, and had supported Van Buren in 1840. Wright thought him vain, excitable and indiscreet, seeking to secure credit for himself from the reply to his questions. Van Buren sent this reply to Wright, who took a night upon it, thought well of it, and read it to his messmates.

York Evening Post of the treaty for the annexation of Texas submitted by Tyler. "It is John Tyler's last card for a popular whirlwind to carry him through; and he has played it with equal intrepidity and address. He has compelled Clay and Van Buren to stake their last chance upon opposition to the measure *now*, and has forced himself upon the whole Democracy as their exclusive candidate for the Presidency next December."[16]

Cool-headed Silas Wright at once admitted the danger of a serious split in the party because of Van Buren's letter, and saw in the opposition the hand of Calhoun as well as of Tyler. The disaffected improved the Texas question to excite passion and prejudice, and sought in the few days before the conventions in Baltimore to turn the agitation to account in securing votes for any one who would not antagonize the admission of Texas.[17] As a southern man asserted, "Give us any northern man, or any man from a Free State, who will not kill us all off," a demand that clearly excluded Van Buren.[18] So open was the discontent among the Democrats that their opponents were confident of success under Clay's leadership, and so true a Democrat as William R. King, just leaving to represent this country in France, confessed he saw no prospect of victory and a party doomed to defeat. "Discontent, division, despondency, seem to have taken complete possession of a large portion of our prominent men; and, with a decided majority of the people in our favor, we are about to be shamefully beaten, from a want of harmony, and concert of action."[19]

It was decided to print it at once. Van Buren was consulted, and gave his approval, after which Hammet was sought. While this search was being made, arrangements were made with Rives for putting it in type. When Hammet was run down, he "was frightened, and it was with some difficulty that we induced him to consent to our proposition for publication before he had read it; but he behaved well, and himself and the Major remained at the Globe office until about midnight, to examine the proof." *Wright to Van Buren*, April 29, 1844. MS. Blair was sick at the time, but had the letter read to him; and Rives offered Hammet one hundred dollars for the manuscript.

[16] Adams, *Memoirs*, XII, 22.

[17] *Wright to the New York Delegation to the Baltimore Convention*, May 2, 1844.

[18] *Parmenter to Bancroft*, May 6, 1844. MS.

[19] *King to Bancroft*, May 12, 1844. MS.

Clay was nominated without opposition. Tyler did not obtain the help from his treaty which he had expected. His convention of office-holders met on the same day as the Democratic National Convention, and ended its labors by giving him a nomination without so much as suggesting a running mate. Nothing could have expressed the doubts of the Democrats more clearly than the conduct of the rival party convention. A large majority of the delegates had been instructed or pledged to vote for Van Buren. They turned down the two leading names, Van Buren and Cass, and took up Polk who had been intended for the second place on the ticket; and on the Vice Presidency blundered into naming Silas Wright, who would not accept under any condition, and thus made a second choice necessary in Dallas. New York was set aside and Pennsylvania recognized. Tyler's treaty was rejected by the Senate eight days later, 16 to 35, and Congress adjourned without taking a definite step in the matter of annexation. The session had been fruitful only of profitless discussion.[20]

Now that Van Buren was out of the way, the existence of Tyler as a candidate was a source of danger. Had Van Buren received the nomination, the Tyler following, such as it was, would have been in revolt, and could not hope for any consideration or recognition from the Van Burenites. So pressure was brought upon Tyler to withdraw from the contest. The Polk wing cried out for oblivion to the past, and promised a welcome to the republican ranks. They induced Jackson to write a letter in favor of Tyler's standing aside, on the ground that such a step would unite all Democrats into one family without distinction, all former differences forgotton, and all cordially united in sustaining the Democratic candidates.[21] Tyler believed that his own candidacy had forced the Baltimore Convention to name one who was favorable to the admission of Texas into the Union.[22] The political idea he wished to compass was

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[20] Adams (*Memoirs*, XII, 57) spoke of it as the "first session of the most perverse and worthless Congress that ever disgraced this Confederacy."

[21] *Niles Register*, LXVI. p. 416.

[22] *Tyler to Ritchie*, January 9, 1851.

thus provided for, and he could retire with honor. His letter of withdrawal was published late in August.[23]

An united party! That was the cry, and resolutions on that line began to flow in from every part of the country. Sometimes the poetic and imaginative gave a curious expression to this feeling. "*Resolved,*" said one body of the unterrified, "That in the proceedings of the Baltimore convention we have beheld the summer storm which purifies the atmosphere, succeeded by the bursting forth of the glorious sun, the harbinger of a bright and glorious day."[24] Ritchie, in the *Richmond Enquirer* could see only victory as a result. "It heals all divisions; unites our party with bands of iron." Van Buren, good party man as he was, called upon his followers to support the ticket. He knew as well as we know to-day that it was not his Texas letter which defeated him in the Convention. For years he wrote and talked of the intrigues and plottings that had overthrown him, and his relations with Polk were short and unfortunate, because Polk had reaped the benefits of this underground work. Did Van Buren have cause to complain of methods in which he had been so great an adept? In pursuing his own ends he had educated others in the same school of political management.

Of the campaign methods little will suffice. There were the same riotous claims, the same personalities, the same trickery and evasion, and the same appearance, if not the reality, of fraud, which are noted in the aftermath of every campaign, be it for the election of a President or of a pound-master. Polk's issue was sprung as a surprise, and could best win if carried along with a rush. On Texas the public mind was excited, feverish and unstable. His opponent thought he could win on the old issues, and hardly realized

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[23] Before nine months had passed Tyler complained of Polk's unrelenting war against his sincere friends in office. *To Alexander Gardiner*, May 21, 1845.

[24] Quoted by Bidlack, in *Congressional Globe*, 28th Congress, 1st session p. 662. Summers (*Congressional Globe*, June 4, 1844,) compared the Democratic party to "two shipwrecked mariners, who were clinging to a plank on the tempest-tossed ocean, each struggling to obtain exclusive possession to the destruction of the other, as the only means of salvation; but, when providentially washed ashore, embracing each other, and unitedly singing hosannahs in a transport of joy."

the strength of the Texas measure. Indecent personalities and irrelevant topics gave rise to local flurries, and the campaign swept along till the day of election. Clay was defeated. The blow was stunning to the Whigs. Frelinghuysen claimed that the defeat in New York was due to an "alliance of the foreign vote, and that most impracticable of all organizations, the Abolitionists." Millard Fillmore damned the Abolitionists, and despaired of the Republic. "May God save the country; for it is evident the people will not."[25] The opinion was general that no man of real ability could in the future be elected President; it was to be the reward of mediocrity. Even the Polk following was at first amazed by the victory. It meant the extinction of the Whig party in the southern states.

Intrigue there had been, and plenty of it, north, south and west. The explanation is not sufficient. It was a final and irreparable split between North and South. Northern democrats were pitted against southern democrats, and the policies of the two sections were diametrically opposed. The political historian of New York, Hammond, told the truth to Van Buren. "More than forty years' experience proves the more the Northern Democracy yields to the South, the more she demands; and individuals at the North, after for years acceding to the wishes of the southern men and in the compromising spirit of the Constitution sustaining what are called 'Southern principles' generally receive from that section of the country a feeble and reluctant support."[26] The South was now in open revolt, and intent upon securing full control of the Government. Polk was for annexation simply. Van Buren could not be brought to see the crux of the situation. Clay always thought that the tariff had been the real issue.[27] None admitted the existence of the great moral question of the extension of slavery.[28]

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[25] *Fillmore to Clay*, November 11, 1844.

[26] *Hammond* to *Van Buren*, April 7, 1844. MS.

[27] Meeting in Cincinnati, Salmon P. Chase, chairman, where extension of slavery was the principal subject.

[28] *Clay to James F. Babcock and others*, December 17, 1844.

The question in its essence was this: Was the nation to take upon itself the support and perpetuation of slavery in Texas, and of the slave trade between the Southern States and the people of that government? The question was far-reaching, involving the very existence of the national government, and the very continuance of the Constitution. No one believed that the South would consent to give up one tittle of its hold on the administration of government, or one degree of its power in the national legislature. Dictatorial by training, and wielding a voting strength far beyond their due right, were the right of suffrage to be truly equal, the men from the South kept their authority by measures intolerable in a free country, by methods indefensible in character and tendency, and by threats indecently provocative of scenes in the floor of Congress at once debasing and disgraceful. Under the shelter of the Constitution as then interpreted, the South claimed protection to its peculiar institution, and compelled the North to meet its demands. When Calhoun asserted that the annexation of Texas was necessary to preserve the domestic institutions of the two countries—slavery in the United States and slavery in Texas—he gave away the whole question. Annexation would mean an extension and a perpetuation of slavery, an increase in the political influence of the slave holders, a continuance of the unholy alliance between North and South to maintain the compromise in the Constitution.

Of course, out-and-out annexationists could advance no arguments which were not on the lines favored by the South. Moderate annexationists could use the relations with Mexico, or other interested countries, as a means to secure delay; the eventuality would still foster the slave power. Jackson, Polk, Clay, Benton, Van Buren and others were willing or anxious to take Texas, and for one and the same end, however much they seemed to differ in arguments. Only the open opponents of annexation were able to argue freely though not always effectively. The contrast between two Massachusetts men on this side of the question was illuminative. Webster made three reported speeches during the campaign. In two of them

he spoke of Texas, but his references were by the way and perfunctory.[29] He opposed receiving Texas because he would "do nothing, now or at any time, that shall tend to extend the slavery of the African race on this continent." His speeches were on the tariff, a demand for protection, a permanent, settled, steady, protective policy. He made the Constitution a cover for this demand, and predicted the overthrow of the Constitution should Polk come into the Presidency. Did this result follow? Did not the course of history prove that the tariff issue was of little importance?

Against this course of Webster, place that of John Quincy Adams. He too made three addresses in the campaign. I use the word address advisedly, for campaign speeches they were not. It does not follow that they were not partisan, as Adams felt strongly the Whig side of the contest; but they were something more than partisan,—a personal defence, based upon documentary evidence, upon questions, profoundly affecting the position and tendency of the American States. They contained excellent historical material, expressed in vigorous language. The more important one was delivered at Boston,[30] and gave an account of the negotiations with Mexico for Texas, at once a defence against charges of traitorous conduct, an attack upon Andrew Jackson, and a protest against a war of aggression in behalf of slavery. The second was given at Braintree,[31] and was a defence against the malicious attacks of Charles J. Ingersoll, and an exposition of the causes underlying the Texan question. The third was made at North Bridgewater on November 6, and summarized the essential principles of the campaign.[32]

Adams occupied a solitary position, one that was his fate for the larger part of his public life. He was a Whig,

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[29] At Philadelphia and Valley Forge, *Works*, II, 270, 291. Towards the end of the campaign he did become more expansive on the Texan question, but never left the tariff issue.

[30] Address to the Young Men's Whig Club of Boston, October 7. Printed in the *National Intelligencer*, October 12, 1844.

[31] Published in Niles's *National Register*, LXVII, 154.

[32] Printed in the *Boston Courier*, November, 9, 1844.

who did not hesitate to lash the leaders of that party in State and Nation. He was a supporter of Clay, yet openly critical of his policy and often doubtful of his availability. He could not accept the Liberty Party, and denounced the abolition methods. Such had been his course in the past that hardly an important act in his long and varied career received commendation. The treaty of Ghent, the Florida treaty and his Presidential policy were made the bases of serious charges against him; and his opposition to the extension of slavery while recognizing the legal rights of the States under the Constitution directed upon him the concentrated opposition of all parties and factions, the abolitionists as well as the regulars. Opposition called out his best powers. In Congress he was a master of parliamentary usage, and day after day proved the wrong-headedness of the majority by forcing them to go on record. Such a contest drawn out for months and years could not be fruitful of brilliant victories, and the contemporary view was that it was a futile struggle on his part, and crowned by a barren victory. Yet looking over the ground at this interval of time, the merit of his service and sacrifice becomes evident.[33]

The period was politically one of transition. Feeling the increasing power of the economy of the North, the South struck out for some addition to its strength that should at least enable it to hold its own. Only two methods were possible, disunion or an increase of territory and consequent voting strength in the House. In either case slavery must be maintained as the institution of the southern states. To this time enough votes had been obtained from the North to enable the South to impose its policy upon the nation. It had been a long series of compromises, in which the tariff had played a very important part. The industries

[33] Barton H. Wise, in the *Life of Henry A. Wise*, admits the tactical blunder of the South in raising the question of the right to petition. "As long as the right to petition seemed in any wise abridged, or denied, the anti-slavery party not only awakened the sympathies of many on that score, but were also constantly able to provoke discussion upon the abstract question of slavery; and thus through its existence in the District of Columbia were furnished, as Adams said, with a 'fulcrum for their lever, so much so that he declared he would not abolish slavery there, even if it were in his own power to do so.' "

of the North had sent to Congress men who yielded all to the South. But the rise of a free West threatened to throw over those compromises, and the old arguments no longer gave foundation for the old forms of agreement. Statesmanship could no longer rest upon an ability temporarily to harmonize North and South, or to transmute a protective duty into fugitive slave laws or gag rules. A Clay, who could hedge so skillfully as to face both ways, a Webster who could subsist on the bounty of manufacturers to do their bidding, were as much out of date as a Calhoun, waterlogged by his slavery views, or a Van Buren a northern man flirting with southern principles. Compromises had broken down.

While these men, and their like, were local in aim, Adams is almost the one man in public life who bulks large, on a national scale. He who had negotiated the Florida treaty, and alone in Monroe's Cabinet stood out for including Texas, could not be mistaken in the meaning to the South of annexation in 1844. That very treaty was now brought forward as a means of charging him with treachery to his country and to his trust. The charge was supported by southern men, with Jackson in the lead. The man who had deliberately left the Federalist party upon a question of principle, and had been the butt of the democracy of the Middle West, the Jacksonian democracy, had nothing to learn of partisan warfare. The despairing bitterness of dying Federalism and the exuberant strength and unrestrained coarseness of the new democracy had given him a varied experience in all forms of abuse. He had seen his own policy as President hooted out of court by his successors, and he returned to Congress with no backing other than was given by the handful of supporters in his district, and by his own unquestioned abilities and upright heart.

He possessed in a great measure a quality that is particularly exasperating,—an intelligently directed unexpectedness. He alone was able to speak the truth, no matter how unpalatable to friend and foe. While Polk was ringing all possible changes on Texas, and while Clay was striving to stem the current towards annexation by bending to its

force, Adams stated exactly what had been, was, and was to be. His learning and method made his exposition of telling and permanent weight. After 1844 it would be impossible to hold to the charge that Texas had been sacrificed by Adams in 1819, or that Jackson's course on that question had even a shadow of consistency to cover its naked weakness. After 1844 no one need have gone astray as to Jackson's fairness, his prejudices, or his intentions in his approaches to Texas. The plain statement of facts by Adams, touched as it was with an intense personal indignation, put an end to the flow of misrepresentation which served to cloak greed and political intrigue. The blow told where he wanted it most to tell. Jackson and his followers gasped, denounced "little Johnny Q," that wicked old man, that mendacious old scoundrel, and poured out replies that did everything but overthrow the cold facts so regularly marshalled by Adams. His progress in developing his attitude on slavery had been rapid, and had landed him in an unexpected position. The Missouri question of 1820 brought the question and its possibilities before him, but vaguely. Was it not Rufus King, one of the really able men of the day, who first pointed out to Adams the dire consequences lurking in that problem of statehood? After his Presidency he took his ground, and told the South that most unpalatable truth, the doom of slavery, and from that time he becomes the embodiment of that question. So much so that the movement to expel him from the House was based upon the idea that if he could be removed from the councils of the nations or silenced on the exasperating subject to which he was devoting himself none other could be found hardy enough to fill his place.[34]

But he did not confine himself to criticism and denunciation of conduct; he had a remedy, which involved punishment to the South, in that it would deprive them of their special privilege of unequal representation. He saw the evil in the aristocratic provision of the Constitution that gave to a small number of whites in the slave states a dis-

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[34] Thomas T. Marshall, quoted in Quincy's *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, 388.

proportionate share of political power on account of their property in their fellowmen. To him, this human chattel representation was the "fatal drop of prussic acid" in the Constitution of the United States, opposed to popular representation, to self-evident truths, and to the letter and spirit of the Constitution itself. It was not so much that each holder of slaves had substantially two votes, but that "every member representing slaves is bound in league offensive and defensive, with all the rest. Every member represents the whole mass. They are knit together in one line, while diverse interests and conflicting opinions distract the councils of the other portion of the House, and always surrender the cause of freedom to the congregated representatives of slavery."[35] This was the situation in the Senate, in the Executive and in the Judiciary as well as in the House. Was it not true courage that inspired him to attack a policy so strongly intrenched?

The system of representation in the national legislature was indefensibly wrong. That a slaveholder and five slaves should exercise four times the political influence of a freeman was a condition only equal to the rotten borough system in England in the eighteenth century. Even if a good word could be said in its favor in 1788, no good word could be said in its behalf in 1844. It involved an inequality that was vitally oppressive and of unending mischief in the political life of the Nation.[36] It was a Massachusetts man[37] who stated in a public report that slave representation was "effecting, by slow but sure degrees, the overthrow of all the noble principles that were embodied in the Federal Constitution," and the Massachusetts legislature asked for the repeal of the clause in the Constitution providing for the representation of slaves. Adams welcomed the support as giving him the first and probably the last opportunity of giving to the world his deliberate opinion

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[35] *Adams to Seward*, May 10, 1844. MS.

[36] In April, 1844, John Quincy Adams wrote "the standing supremacy of the slave representation is 112, a bare majority of the House, consisting of 80 slave-holders and thirty-two free-trade auxiliaries." *Memoirs*, XII, 14.

[37] Charles Francis Adams. See also his pamphlet, *Texas and the Massachusetts Resolutions*, Boston, 1844.

upon so disastrous a feature of American political institutions.[38]

What then did the campaign of 1844 solve? Not the annexation of Texas, because that measure was already assured in spite of the decent attitude of delay or reserve some of the leaders might assume. Not questions of tariff, bank, distribution or land sales, for no popular mandate could dictate the details of measures in which private interests were predominant. The personality of Polk meant nothing, not so much in fact as the personality of the defeated candidate, Clay. Yet there was then decided one of the most momentous issues in our history. North was at last pitted against South, and the struggle for supremacy was to last for sixteen years, under constantly aggravating friction. The policy of the South was determined beyond any change, and it only asked an impossibility—to be allowed to work out its destiny without aid, counsel or interference from the North. The situation made it impossible for Polk to recognize the Van Buren wing of his party. No follower of Van Buren was given a place in the Cabinet, or received an office which gave access to the President. Marcy was an opponent to Van Buren; Buchanan had plotted against him; and both were willing to vote for what the South desired. The split in the party was not to be healed, and the old leaders went down before it. A younger generation was coming forward, men like Seward, Giddings and Chase, who would be in at the death of this issue of slavery, themselves leaders in a new party, and themselves disciples of John Quincy Adams. Turn the hands of the clock on a little. The homely and direct pronouncement of Lincoln, "The Nation cannot exist half slave, half free," could have been uttered by Adams, for it expressed his opinion. The

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[38] With Joshua R. Giddings, Adams prepared the minority report on these resolutions of the Massachusetts Legislature, 28th Cong. 1 sess. House Report 404. The incident is of high interest. The committee appointed by the House to consider these resolutions consisted of nine members, Adams, Rhett, (for whom Burt was substituted) J. R. Ingersoll, Gilmer, Garrett Davis, Burke, Sample, Morse and Giddings. Six reports were presented: Giddings joined with Adams, Burt with Gilmer Davis with Ingersoll, and individual reports were made by Burke, Sample and Morse. It would be difficult to find a similar instance of discrepant views.

freeing of the slaves under stress of war and an armed occupation of the southern states, was only a fulfilment of Adam's assertion of emancipation under martial law. With the disappearance of slavery also went the chattel representation in Congress, and so the "drop of prussic acid" was extracted from the Constitution. "The moral question of the North American revolution," said Adams, "was one and the same with that of the institution of domestic slavery. It is a question between might and right, between the law of justice and the law of force." The campaign of 1844 marked the culminating point in Adams's career, and leaves him in high relief as the statesman of that time.

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